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The ABUSE of FEASTING and
RECREATIONS.

CONSIDER'D in a
S E R M O N

Preach'd at the
Evening-Lecture
I N
Fetter-lane-street, L O N D O N.

December 26, 1717.

To which is added,
A Discourse concerning the Origin
and superstitious Observance of
Religious Festivals.

By *T H O M A S R I D G L E T.*

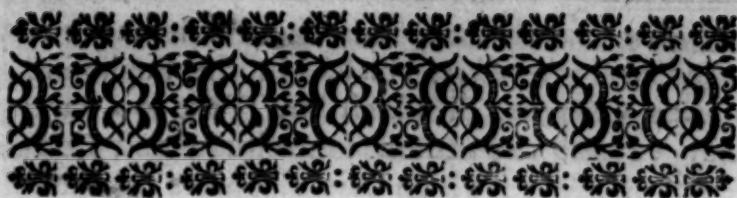
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EXOD. XXXII. vi.

— *And the People sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.*

WE read, in some foregoing Chapters of this Book, how wonderfully God appeared for his People, in delivering them from their cruel Oppressors, when their very Hope was cut off, and they looked for nothing else, but to be worn out with perpetual Servitude, or swallow'd up in the *Graves that were in Egypt*. When God had deliver'd them they sang his Praise, *Chap. 15*. After this, God condescends to converse with them, from Heaven, in such a Way as he never spake to any People before. They heard His Voice, *out of the midst of the Fire*, attended with many Ensigns of terrible Majesty, *and yet liv'd*; which was beyond their Expectation, and reckoned an uncommon Instance of Divine Goodness, *Deut. 5. 23. and Chap. 4. 33*. After this, *Moses* is called up into the Mount where God was immediately present; and while he continued there, we have an unaccountable Instance of Stupidity and Degeneracy in *Israel*, who publicly revolt from their God, whom,

but a few Days before, they had so solemnly engaged to serve, *Chap. 19. 8.* In the Beginning of this Chapter, of which my Text is a Part, they express the utmost Ingratitude and Contempt of *Moses*; which Crime appears yet more heinous, when we consider the many Wonders that God wrought by his Hand for their Deliverance; *As for this Moses* (say they) *the Man that brought us up out of the Land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.* 'He is gone from us, and we care not whether we see his Face again or no. When Sin abounds, it not only breaks the Bonds of Friendship; but renders a People unmindful of all the Laws of Gratitude. They who have been made publick Blessings to them; to whom, under God, they owe their Lives, their Liberties, yea, all that's dear to them in this World, these shall not have common Justice from Them, by whom God and his true Worship, are abandoned. *Moses* is slighted; but that's not all, for they resolve to make Choice of other Gods, *Make us Gods to go before us.* And the People were so set upon this Idolatry; that *Aaron*, who was left among them, could not stem the Tide of their Opposition. Therefore, to excuse himself, when reproved by *Moses*, he devolves the whole Blame on the wicked, tumultuous, and ungovernable Disposition of the People, *Ver. 22. Thou knowest the People, that they are set on Mischief.* And some Jewish Writers suppose that *Hur*, whom we read of, *Chap. 4. 14.* but never after this, oppos'd them herein, having more Zeal and Courage for God, than *Aaron* had, and dy'd in his Cause, in the Tumult; tho' this is asserted without just Grounds, since Scripture is silent with Reference to it.

How

However *Aaron* gives Way, and commands them to bring their *golden Ear-rings*, which they had taken from the *Egyptians*, *Ver. 2.* Those Riches, which God had given them, they willingly part with to his Dishonour; and the Trophies of their Victory over their Enemies, were turned to the basest Use. *Aaron* makes a *Golden Calf*, and then the People say, *Ver. 4. These be thy Gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the Land of Egypt.* This was so heinous a Sin, that many of the *Jews* think all the Miseries, that have happen'd to them since that Time, are owing to it. Others pass it over in Silence, as not willing that the worst Part of the Character of their Forefathers should be transmitted to Posterity. Thus *Josephus* * mentions *Moses's* going up to the Mount, and tells how the People were divided in their Sentiments about him: Some being afraid that he was destroyed in the Fire or devour'd by wild Beasts, under which Apprehensions others endeavour to comfort 'em. He speaks also of *Moses's* bringing down the Two Tables of the Law, but not a Word of the *Golden Calf*.

Another *Jewish* Writer † takes Notice of this their Idolatry, but charges it on the restless Temper, and inconstant Disposition of some amongst them. Others lay the Sin at the Door of the mix'd Multitude, which came out of *Egypt* with them, who notwithstanding their pretending to be Profelytes to the *Jewish* Religion, were upon all Occasions, so fond of the Religion of their Country, that they were often Ringleaders in the Murmurings and Rebellions that were a-

* *Jos. Antiq. lib. 3. cap. 5.* † *Philo Jud. in Vit. Mosi.*

mongst them, and it may be, in this Idolatry.

Others excuse the Tribe of *Levi* from having any Hand in it, pretending that *Aaron* was forc'd to take their *golden Ear-rings* and throw them into the Fire, but did no more; but the Devil fram'd them into the Shape of a Calf; and, as they say, made it move and bleat, as tho' it had been alive; and that many of the unthinking People, who were not active herein at first, seeing this which look'd so much like a Miracle, comply'd with those that first set it on foot. These are the Methods which some *Jewish* Writers take to palliate or excuse this Crime. And then among others who enquire into the Meaning of this Account of their first Apostacy, some think they cou'd not be so stupid to suppose, the Gold which they had seen forged into a graven Image could be really a God, and therefore the Meaning is; This is a Representation of the God that brought thee up out of the Land of Egypt: Or, This is an Image, by which the God that brought thee out of the Land of Egypt, will be worshipped; and so herein they break not the first, but the second Commandment. However, this is in Scripture, often call'd *serving other Gods*: And God is no less offended when an Invasion is made on the Purity of his Worship, than when an Image is made the ultimate Object thereof. Now when *Aaron* finds the People thus resolutely inclin'd to their idolatrous Worship, he sets it forward with the specious Pretence of proclaiming a Feast to *Jehovah*: *To morrow is a Feast to the Lord*, Ver. 5. And then 'tis said in my Text, *That they rose up early on the Morrow, and offered Burnt Offerings, and brought Peace Offerings, and the People sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.* We find in

in the Law concerning Burnt Offerings, that they were wholly consumed ; but Peace Offerings were Part consumed and Part fed upon. In Imitation hereof, the People, when they had offered Peace Offerings, of their own Invention, they feasted upon Part thereof, and this Festival was attended with Mirth : But as the whole Service was idolatrous, so the Mirth, with which it was perform'd, was very displeasing to God ; the Worshipers being wholly abandoned to Luxury, and all manner of Abominations.

All that I shall consider in the Words, shall be,

First, Their Festival ; They sat down to eat and to drink.

Secondly, The unlawful Mirth attending it ; They rose up to Play.

The Doctrinal Proposition which may justly be deduc'd from hence is this,

When a People forget the Mercies of God and depart out of his holy Ways, they are oftentimes given up to all manner of Licentiousness.

Passing by what might be farther said concerning *Israel's* Idolatry, I shall only insist on two general Heads,

First, Man's Proneness to forget the Mercies of God, and go astray from him after having receiv'd amazing Instances of his Care and loving Kindness.

Secondly, The Consequence hereof ; their being given up to all manner of Licentiousness.

1. Man's

1. *Man's Proneness to depart from God after having received signal Tokens of his Favour.* 'Tis said of Israel, *Psal.* 106. 12, 13. *They sang his Praise, but soon forgot his Works.* While God is loading a People with his Benefits, laying the greatest Obligations on them, they are very apt to forget his Mercies. There is something in the Heart of Man that inclines him to return to Folly, or to turn aside from God like a deceitful Bow. We may often observe this in those who are in a *State of Unregeneracy*, if God convinces and awakens them under his Ordinances, how quickly do they lose the Sense thereof. They are like a Stone thrown up into the Air; so long as the Force that gave Motion to it continues, it ascends; but when that is gone and spent, it naturally descends again to the Earth. No violent Motion is perpetual: When Religion takes its rise from no other Influence than that of common Providence; if the Spirit of God be not the first Mover of all spiritual Actions, the Spring and Principle of all Grace, it will soon degenerate into Formality: But they who are in a state of Nature, have no other Byass but that of Nature: Therefore 'tis no wonder if we see many hopeful Beginnings, which carried a fair resemblance of Grace, miscarry, and leave Men in a state of Apostacy. And if we take a View of *Believers themselves*, who are renew'd but in part; corrupt Nature bears great Sway in their Hearts; Man is prone to *drink Iniquity like Water*; the best of God's Children need his present Assistance to maintain the Grace that is wrought in them, and to fortify them against the Opposition it meets with; without this, they will

will soon forget his Mercies, and grow stupid, after having beheld the brightest Displays thereof. O the Ingratitude that reigns in the Hearts of Men, when former remarkable Deliverances make no Impression on them! *Moses's* Reproof to *Israel* may have a far larger Application, *Deut. 32. 6. Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish People and unwise? 'Is this your Behaviour towards God your Deliverer, and the Fountain of all your Happiness?*

We may apply this to those who have receiv'd national Mercies. When we are in imminent Danger of Ruin, then we are ready to say, as *Pharaoh* to *Moses*, *Intreat the Lord for me, that He wou'd take away this Death*: But when the Hand of God is taken away, our Hearts grow as hard as ever. Sometimes we are ready to promise to our selves, that if God will appear in this Extremity, then we will walk more closely and humbly with him: He appears, is seen in the Mount of Difficulty, but we still remain unreformed. Would to God this was not too visible in the Day and Age in which we live! May we not say, that, tho' we have been under so many Engagements, we have forgotten our God, and *lightly esteemed the Rock of our Salvation*; and what follows, but Sin abounding without Restraint, excess of Riot without Remorse, and our being render'd more vile and miserable by our Impieties, than we cou'd have been by our Afflictions.

But this leads us to the *Second general Head*, which I design principally to insist on, *viz. That when a People thus forget the Engagements God has laid on them, they are often given up to all manner of Licentiousness.*

B

There

There are in my Text two Things in which the Licentiousness of a sinful Revolting People very much consists; one is the *Abuse of God's good Creatures*, which He gives for Food to support our frail dying Natures; the other is the *Abuse of those Recreations* which God has allow'd us.

First, Let us consider the *Abuse of God's good Creatures by excess of Gluttony, Drunkenness and Intemperance*. Was Man made for no higher an End than to gratify his carnal Appetite? or is making Provision for the Flesh, as valuable an End as securing the welfare of the immortal Soul? What Pity is it that the Bounty, which we receive from the Hand of God, shou'd render us unfit to give him that Tribute of Duty which he demands at our Hands; But this is the Case of those we are to speak of, *the People sat down to eat and drink*. You'll say, if we abstract from their Idolatry, was their Eating and Drinking unlawful? None can suppose that it was: But that which is designed for Health may prove Poison to us. It is a great Blessing for God to give us a Table spread; this David thankfully acknowledges, *Thou preparest a Table before me in the presence of mine Enemies, my Cup runneth over, Psal. 23. 5*. God is said to open his Hand and satisfy the Desires of every living thing. These are the Gifts of Nature, Blessings necessary for the Support of Life; the Use of them is a part of that Liberty He hath given us; for as God provides Food, He gives Man a right to use it. Sometimes He has provided one sort of Food, at other times, another sort. It is thought by many that there was no
Flesh

Flesh eat till after the Flood, because when God gave Man a Right to his Food, which was not to be used without a Divine Grant, 'tis said, *Gen. 1. 29.* He gave him *every Herb bearing Seed, and every Tree in which is the Fruit of a Tree yielding Seed*: But here is nothing said of the Beasts of the Earth being given for Food. But afterwards God gave him Liberty to eat Flesh, *viz.* after the Flood; therefore says he to *Noah*, *Gen. 9. 3.* *Every moving Thing that liveth, shall be Meat for you, even as the green Herb have I given you all Things: q. d.* ' You had before, the
 ' Fruits of the Earth allowed you for Food, but
 ' now the Flood has destroy'd your Food for the
 ' present; and since the Food that it shall pro-
 ' duce, shall not be so nourishing or delightful
 ' as it was at first, therefore you may supply the
 ' Want thereof by eating Flesh. If this Obser-
 vation be just, we may infer from it, that, when Man liv'd most sparingly, then his Age was long-
 est; as in those that lived eight or nine hundred Years before the Flood: However, I can't think it is demonstrable, neither is the Knowledge hereof necessary to Salvation, therefore I pass it over. 'Tis sufficient for us to observe, That God's own People have sometimes had most of his Presence, when they have had least of those Dainties that are agreeable to their Appetites: Good *Jacob* seems to make a very modest Request with Respect to temporal Blessings, *Gen. 28. 20.*
 ' Let God but give me Bread to eat, and Raiment
 ' to put on, and I am satisfy'd. 'Tis the Conveniencies of Life, not the Delicacies thereof, that a Believer most desires. Not but that Feasting is sometimes spoken of in Scripture, as used by good Men, and not in the least discommended;

yea, our Saviour himself was sometimes present at Feasts; they are not therefore in themselves unlawful. They who have the greatest Share of the Riches of this World, have generally most of its pleasant Things: *Asaph's* Blessing contain'd in it a Confluence of *Royal Dainties*, Gen. 49. 20. And *Job's* Sons are allow'd to make Entertainments, in their Houses, every one his Day, while their Father is in his Prosperity, if they don't sin herein, by *cursing God in their Hearts*, Job 1. 4, 5. But others who have less of the outward good Things of Providence, have no other Festivals, but those which a good Conscience entertains them with. Which I take to be the Meaning of that Aphorism of the wise Man, *Prov. 15. 15. He that is of a merry Heart, hath a continual Feast.* If such a one as *John the Baptist* is desirous to live in the Wilderness, and aspires not after the Grandeur of Princes Palaces, he is as well satisfy'd with what the Wilderness affords, *Locusts and wild Honey*, as others are with the greatest Variety of Dishes, that Art can invent, or Luxury desire.

But we shall consider the Abuse of Eating and Drinking in four Particulars.

1. We sin herein *when we receive the Blessings of Providence that are necessary for the Support of Life, without owning the God that gives them.* This Stupidity is reproved by that small Scantling of Gratitude found even in Brutes, *The Ox knows his Owner, and the Ass his Master's Crib*, Isa. 1. 3. 'tis unbecoming a Man as well as a Christian. We ought to beg a Blessing from God on every one of his Gifts, therefore not to forget him when we receive our necessary Food, this is too solemn an Ordinance to be made a Jest of, as
the

the greatest Part do, with whom *saying Grace*, as it is term'd, is nothing else but whispering over a few Words with too much of Hurry to admit of Attention; and too little Seriousness to deserve the Name of Religious Worship. What a shameful Abuse is this of a Duty founded in the Law of Nature, and recommended by the Example of Christ himself, who before He fed the Multitude with the Loaves and Fishes, *looked up to Heaven*, Mat. 14. 19. and *gave Thanks*, Chap. 15. 36. And the Apostle Paul in his dangerous Voyage, when all the Company with him were almost starved, not for Want of Meat, of which there was Plenty in the Ship, but through Neglect to eat, despairing of Life, 'tis said, *he took Bread*, Acts 27. 35. and *gave Thanks to God*, in the Presence of them all. This was also practis'd by the Jewish Church; therefore the People would not eat in their set Festivals, till Samuel came to *bless the Sacrifice*, i. e. came to beg a Blessing on what remain'd of it, design'd for Food, 1 Sam. 9. 13. What need have we to beg of God, on such Occasions, that our Table may not become a Snare, as the Royal Prophet speaks, *Psal. 69. 22.* or Occasion of Sin; that the Curse of God may be taken from the Food we eat, that *while the Meat is in our Mouths, his Wrath may not come upon us!* And have we not Reason to own before God, that we are poor, worthless Creatures, who receive all, by his Gift, though forfeited by our Iniquities? And then are we not to consider that there is another Life to be supported, besides that which is upheld by Food; for the Soul lives by every Word that proceedeth out of the Mouth of God. And then when we have received the Blessings of God, we must express our Thankfulness;

fulness ; every Creature is to be received with Thanksgiving, 1 Tim. 4. 4. 'Tis a seasonable Warning, which God gives his People, Deut. 6. 11, 12. When thou shalt have eaten and be full, then beware lest thou forget the Lord. And Israel is reproved for not knowing, or acknowledging, that God gave them Corn, and Wine, and Oyl, Hos. 2. 8. To receive Mercies without owning the God of our Mercies, is to sin in the Use of them.

Secondly, Feasting is unlawful, when it is unseasonable ; when we rejoyce in those Times when God calls to Mourning, Baldness, and girding with Sackcloth, and as it were resolve not to behold, or be afraid of the Judgments he is preparing, and which our Sins give us just Ground to expect. Such a Temper of Mind as this will be followed with the most dreadful Instances of God's Displeasure, This Iniquity, says he in the like Case, shall not be purged away till you die, Isa. 22. 12, 13, 14. Have we grieved the Holy Spirit ; hardened our Hearts ; cast Contempt on the Grace of the Gospel ; sinned presumptuously, notwithstanding the frequent Warnings which we have had of the sad Consequence thereof : And yet is there no Room left for serious Reflexion ? Israel must not rejoyce, as other People, when they have gone a whoring from their God : And if God is hereby provoked to depart from them, it is Time for them to put off their Ornaments and mourn after him, Hos. 9. 1. Exod. 33. 4.

But suppose the Hand of God is not immediately stretch'd out against us, yet if it is a Day of Rebuke with Respect to the Church of God, in many Parts of the World, if the Devil is suffer'd to come down with great Wrath, with an Army of Persecutors, breathing out Threat-
nings

nings and Slaughter against the Saints ; if Multitudes, of whom the World is not worthy, are resisting unto Blood, striving against Sin, bearing an honourable Testimony to the Cause of Christ, at the Expence of all that's dear to them in the World, should we, at the same Time act as those who are altogether Strangers to this Cause, and unconcern'd for them, who espouse, and are an Ornament to it ; How preposterous does this look in those who pretend to be Members of the same Mystical Body ! They are justly reprov'd, *That drink Wine in Bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief Ointments, a Custom much used of old in Feasting, but are not grieved for the Afflictions of Joseph, Amos 6. 6.*

Thirdly, We sin in eating and drinking, when the Excess hereof renders us stupid, preys upon our Constitution, and unfits our Thoughts for the Service of God. This is to live apace, dig our own Graves, and murder our selves by insensible Degrees : How contrary is it to what the Apostle directs, 1 Cor. 10. 31. *Whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever you do, do all to the Glory of God.* I might have considered the Sin of Drunkenness, and so have taken a View of Man, as sunk below himself, and lying under such a Mark of Infamy, as is hardly to be found in Creatures of a lower Rank. But I want Words to express the Aggravation of their Sin, who, under a Pretence of Friendship, first tempt Men thus to expose themselves, and then insult their Weakness when they have disarm'd them of Reason it self. Some indeed have contracted such a vicious Habit, that though they are *enflam'd*, they are not *disguised*, with Wine ; these have a Woe pronounc'd against them, *Isa. 5. 11, 22.*

Fourthly,

Fourthly, It is a hard Matter to lead a feasting Life, without sinning in the Abuse of God's Creatures. If Health be not hereby impaired, which is generally the Consequence of such a Life, Religion will certainly be at a low Ebb. And, whether this be design'd or no, it will appear, in the End, to have been little better than making Provision for the Flesh, to fullfil the Lusts thereof. We have but one Instance in Scripture of such a Life as this, and that had a miserable End, as described in the Parable of the rich Glutton, who fared sumptuously every Day, Luke 16. 19. It is a hard Matter for such not to make their Belly their God, which if they do, they are professed Enemies of the Cross of Christ; their Case for the present is deplorable, and their End Destruction, Phil. 3: 18, 19.

Having consider'd the Abuse of Eating and Drinking, I come,

Secondly, To consider how we may be said to sin in the Use of Recreations. Recreation, if rightly us'd, is not only allowable but necessary. The Bow that is too much bent will soon break. The Thoughts over-charged with Business, will be tir'd, and so render'd unfit for it. The Mind is delighted with Variety of Objects, and those Amusements, which are in themselves least valuable, may render it fit to entertain it self with Things of a higher Nature.

But since Things in themselves lawful, are often abused, we shall consider the Abuse of Recreations in three Heads.

First, When we make what is serious, the Subject of our light Thoughts or Discourse. The airy Flights of Wit and Fancy best become those Subjects

jects that are less solid, or design'd to please rather than profit : But let not any Thing, on which God has instamp't his Glory, or whereby he makes himself known, have no better than the Scum and Froth of our Thoughts. Consider that awful Word, *The Lord will not hold him guiltless, that taketh his Name in vain.*

Secondly, It is unlawful to divert or recreate ourselves with the Vices of the Age in which we live. He is branded with the Character of a Fool, who makes a Mock at Sin, *Prov. 14. 9.* Then, what shall we say of those, who are easily tempted to frequent some celebrated *Stage Plays*, where Religion and Vice have their Turns to be expos'd ? Yea, where the Perfections of God are often revil'd by Oaths and Blasphemy ; at other Times his tremendous Works, Thunder, Lightning, and Tempest, represented by Art ; and who can, without Horror, behold infernal Spirits, pretended to be releas'd from their Chains of Darkness to converse with Men ; and a thousand other Things, which rather tend to corrupt than improve the Mind.

Obj. But 'twill be objected, These are Instances of its Deformity ; the Stage is not to be universally condemn'd, for some few Blemishes therein ; we are sometimes invited to see those Plays in which Wisdom and Virtue are recommended to our Imitation ; or Vice render'd contemptible and ridiculous : The Rebel looks more like a Madman here, than he did when he first enter'd into the Field of Battle ; Is an Hour spent in such Amusements a Sin ?

Ans. I shall not descend to Particulars in answering this Objection ; but only consider what respects the recommending Virtue, or exposing Vice in general, in such a Way. C 1. As

1. As to the former of these, *Virtue* is best recommended, as its Lustre shines forth in Scripture, and is beheld 'acted in the Conversation of Men. Religion is to be learn'd under the Ordinances of God, not in those Places where Scripture Language sounds very odd; or, if used, it is with a Design to raise Laughter, and not to support the Authority of those sacred Oracles. And are these the Nurseries of Virtue? When I hear a Person say, he has often learn'd more at a Play than a Sermon; I must conclude him to intend hereby, either such Preaching where human Passions and Frailties are set forth, instead of the Gospel; or else the Man knows not what it is to profit under any Instructions.

2. As to what concerns the *exposing of Vice*, especially in a diverting Way, this will have but little Tendency to make Men out of Love with it; or if it were possible, by this Means, to lessen the Reputation of open Profaneness and Immorality, this would indeed inhance the Value of external Religion, but have no Tendency to promote that inward Work, whereby a Soul is enabled to give up himself to God, and to walk humbly with him. But, since the great Plea alledged is, That Vice is hereby expos'd, methinks it were far better to lament the Folly and Misery of Sinners, whilst we detest their Way. The Consideration of our natural Proneness to those Sins that look so vile in others, should rather draw forth our Pity than Scorn. *David* professes that *when he beheld Transgressors, he was grieved*; and that in an uncommon Degree, for, says he, *Rivers of Waters run down mine Eyes, because Men keep not thy Law*, Psalm 119. 158. compar'd with 136. Let me farther add, That there are some

some Sins, which, as the Apostle says, *are not to be named*, Eph. 5. 3. much less, represented and expos'd, in such a Way as this.

If you say, This will render Vice detested by some: Is there not Danger of its being chosen and embrac'd, with more Eagerness, by others? The Way to prevent the spreading of some Sins, is to conceal them; 'Twere better not to know how vile the Manners of Men are, than to have them represented to us, in such a Way, as often makes Men Profelytes to those Vices which are expos'd. Shew me an Instance of one that has been reformed by the Stage; and, I am confident, a thousand may be produced, whom it has corrupted. Let not the thoughtless Youth, therefore, run into Satan's Snare. Shall Morality take its Rise, from those Places where Apostacy oft-times has its Beginning? If Curiosity alone has led you there, 'tis a dangerous Experiment, where it is not safe so much as to approve of the most artful Performance. Are you uneasy, whilst thus giving the Reins to Fancy? What is this, but a secret Repulse of Conscience, which argues that you boldly venture on what you allow not of? Are you satisfy'd and pleas'd with your chimerical Entertainment? 'Tis well if this Satisfaction be not judicial, and you tempted to pursue your own Ruin, or open a wide Breach, thro' which Destruction and Death may enter. To this we may justly apply what Solomon says of the lewd Woman, *Prov. 7. 26, 27. She hath cast down many wounded, yea, many strong Men have been slain by her; her House is the Way to Hell, going down to the Chambers of Death.*

Thirdly, *Some Games are in themselves unlawful, and others rendered so by the Abuse thereof.* Un-

der this Head I would not be suppos'd, on the one Hand, to condemn all Games; nor on the other, to enter into a particular Detail of what may be judg'd lawful. It is good, in this Case, to steer by the Compass of Scripture, the Design whereof, as far as it concerns them, is not so much to dictate, as to regulate our Diversions, or to shew how far the Mind may be disengaged from immediate Acts of Worship, and yet glorify God. Nothing is more common, than for those who treat of this Subject, to distinguish between those Games, in which the Victory is obtain'd by *Art*; and others wherein 'tis devolv'd by *Lot*; or those which are purely an Entertainment of the *Mind*; and such as are also an Exercise of the *Body*, and so contribute greatly to the maintaining of Health; Also between such as are *manly*, and agreeable to our *Condition*; and others that are *effeminate* or *puerile*.

But, not to enlarge on each of these Particulars, we shall consider,

1. There are some Games unlawful to one, which may not be so to another.

2. Others have many Circumstances attending them, which render them unlawful to all,

1. *Some Games may be lawful to some, which are not so others.* In this Matter, every one ought to be a Judge for himself, and may see Reason to decline some Diversions, which notwithstanding he forbears to censure in others. This may be considered in five Cases,

1. When we entertain some *Doubt concerning the Lawfulness* of that, which notwithstanding we practise; when we comply, but approve not of it. Persuasion or Example have a great Influence over an easy Temper, not guarded with a holy

Refo-

Resolution. A Desire to avoid the Charge of Singularity or Censoriousness, puts us on doing many Things, which, though otherwise indifferent, may become a Snare and Inlet to Sin.

2. Those Games are unlawful to us, which have a *Tendency*, above what they have in others, to *defile our Souls*, and unfit them for holy Duties. Hereby the Design of all Recreations is prevented: For every one who is acquainted with the experimental Part of Religion, will readily allow, that whatsoever hinders him in his Way to Heaven, is to be avoided; and we may reckon that a Hindrance to us, which renders us unfit for Meditation about Heavenly Things, or retards our Pursuit after them. Every one is to determine, for himself, whether the Pleasure he has conceived in Games, or other Diversions; the Art and Dexterity he has us'd therein; the Success attending them, or any Circumstances of the like Nature, do not too much embarrass his Thoughts; are not esteem'd too great a Part of his Happiness, or do not give him the greatest Disturbance when engaged in holy Duties, or render his Imaginations vain therein.

3. Those Games are unlawful, in which it is almost *impossible to engage, without running into those Excesses* which render them sinful. If the Game it self be a Temptation hereunto, then it is to be avoided by all: But if the Temptation arises principally from the Treachery and Unruliness of our own Affections, it is unsafe and dangerous for us. Some Games devour Time by Wholesale, when Days and Nights pass away, and are, as it were, murdered, without Observation, or seem but like a few Minutes; such Games must certainly be pronounc'd unlawful.

But

But though one had no more Snares in it than another, yet if we cannot avoid such Extreame, and our Affections run out more after them than Things of a higher Nature, without Doubt they are unlawful for us.

4. When we cannot joyn with others, in Games or other Diversions, without *contracting the Guilt of Sins committed by them*, they are also unlawful for us. How often do we see Instances of exorbitant Passion, foolish Debates about Things of no Consequence; Covetousness, even where the Game would not, at other Times, be thought worth coveting; and many other Corruptions break forth, which to reprove, though with the greatest Tenderness, would be reckoned unreasonable, if not churlish; And to bear our Testimony against them, by withdrawing from them, as, vain, unsuitable Companions, would be ill resented: But not to do this, is to contract the Guilt of the Sin of others.

5. Whatsoever the Game be that we engage in, it is unlawful to us, *if we use it as an Expedient merely to pass away Time*. Winter-Evenings are reckon'd by some the Dead-weight of Time, a Drug lying upon our Hands, and therefore many Games have been invented, as a Relief under this Grievance. But surely they who use them only with this View, little consider how precious every Moment of Time is; how irrevocable when gone; and how much depends on our Improvement of it. Does he think it so cheap a Thing, who is arrived to the utmost Limits thereof, having received a Summons to that Tribunal, where an Account must be given of this as well as other Talents? But alas! when we have no such present Views before us, these Methods

thods are contrived to pass it away for Want of something that will turn to more Account. But must not our Thoughts in the mean Time be very barren of what is good, and those we converse with worthless Companions? Yea, must not the Word of God, which is nigh to us at all Times, if it does not afford us a more valuable Delight in vacant Hours, be said to be laid aside as a neglected Book, if we are forc'd to have Recourse to such Diversions for Want of better Entertainment.

Seeing therefore a bad End will render every Action sinful, we must look to it, that in the Use of those Games which are most reputable, and have not the least Appearance of Evil in them, we design to promote the Health of the Body, exhilarate the Mind, dis-burden the Thoughts, refresh the Spirits, that we may be hereby fitted for the Service of God, and to answer those valuable Ends for which we came into the World: In which Case we may warrantably desire and expect the Blessing of God on this, as well as other Actions of Life, which otherwise to do would be Presumption.

But this leads us to a *Second Thing*, to consider *those Games which have many Circumstances of Sin attending them, that render them unlawful for all.*

The Method which many take to determine what Games are in themselves unlawful, has been by laying down this Proposition, *viz.* That all Games which depend on a Lot are unlawful; because Lots are not to be used but in Affairs of Moment, wherein an Appeal may, without profaning the Name of God, be made to him, together with a Request, That He would, by the

Interposure of his Providence, determine the Lot in our Favour : But this is by no means to be done, in those Things which are only Matter of Diversion, and particularly in Games.

On the other Hand, many defend those Games that depend on a Lot, by producing some Instances wherein Lots are used in common Affairs, and Matters oft decided by 'em in Trade, and sometimes, in Things of lesser Moment ; these therefore think they may as well be used in Recreations. They farther add, That there is no other Appeal to God in this Matter, than there is in every Action that is casual, and that, at most, is only implicit. Much more is alledged to the same Purpose, in Favour of Cards and Dice, which they suppose may be made Use of in Games, for which they were invented, without being guilty of the least Sin. Notwithstanding I shall endeavour to make it appear that these are to be rank'd among the Games that are in themselves unlawful.

1. *As to what concerns a Lot in Games it is often found to be an Occasion of Sin :* As, when good or bad Success have the same Influence on our Minds in these trifling, ludicrous Matters, as they generally have in those that are of greater Importance. This appears in the Pleasure we conceive when the Lot turns to our Advantage ; and our Uneasiness when it turns against us : It is well if there be not Murmurings and Repinings at Providence ; and the viler Sort of Men can hardly forbear sometimes to curse the secret Hand that directs and over-rules the Chance. These Games naturally lead Men to commend or blame their Luck or Fortune, as it is called : By which if they intend the Providence of God, it is a Profanation

tion of his Name and Glory. But, if something less than this is intended hereby, it carries in it, at least, the Appearance of Evil.

2. Games are unlawful for all *who propose hereby to enrich or advance themselves in the World.* This is to live upon the Plunder of others, as well as to abandon our selves to perpetual Uneasiness. Who can describe the differing Passions that attend every Cast of the Dice, the hellish Oaths and Execrations, the Result of that Rage and Frenzy, which distracts the Mind, when it meets with what they reckon an unhappy Chance? Let the Loser but give himself Time to think, and he will exclaim against the Game, that has been his Ruin; and himself as one of the most beguiled Wretches in the World. But suppose, on the other Hand, he be lifted up with Success, and the Lot turns to his Advantage, the Riches thus got are not enjoy'd with much Satisfaction; or it may be, they are soon lost again, for it often happens, that he who is a Prince to Day, is a Beggar to morrow. And is this a Life to be desir'd? Will the greatest Gain compensate for the Unhappiness and Sin that attends it? Surely Games so used are unlawful; This, I suppose, most will allow of, and there are none who have so much as the Form of Religion, but will detest the Thoughts of being of their Number, who are here described: Therefore that even such may be included in our present Argument, consider,

3. Those Games are unlawful, wherein *holy, edifying Discourse is reckon'd unseasonable*, and always check'd as ill-tim'd, and inconsistent with the present Diversions, and would give a Kind of Disgust to them who are not displeas'd at it.

at other Times, yea, this is an effectual Means to put the Game to an End. Now I may venture to appeal to those who use the Games we are particularly opposing, whether this be not universally true, with Respect to them: And whether, while we are engag'd in them, good Thoughts are not check'd in our own Souls, or at least referr'd to a more convenient Season? I beseech you try the Game by this Touch-stone; indulge serious Thoughts, tho' it be but for some few Minutes, while your Companions are otherwise employ'd; try if you can converse with God in this Exercise, and you'll certainly find, That either spiritual Thoughts are quench'd, and put off, or the Game must be laid aside. What is this then but, for a while, to be estranged from, and live *without God in the World?* Ought not *Holiness to the Lord* to be wrote on all our Recreations, as well as secular Employments; that is the Beauty and Glory of every Action, without which no solid Peace can attend, or real Good be brought out of it. Neither can we at the same Time be reckon'd to be in God's Way: Would it not therefore be dangerous, and in God's Account, dishonourable, to be found so doing? What is it but wholly to withdraw our Thoughts from him, under a Pretence of indulging these Recreations, which cannot therefore be us'd to his Glory?

4. Those Games are unlawful which are not of *Good Report*; yea, are *an Offence to, and weaken the Hands of many sincere Christians*, and are in many Respects injurious to the Interest of Christ in the World: But all these Things may, in some Measure, be said of the Games we are opposing. This Argument is strong and conclusive, however I am sensible that many are so far

far from being convinced by it, that 'tis treated by 'em with Contempt. I have, you'll say, as great a Right to be offended at what is singular in others, as they have to take Offence at me in this Matter : Might I not as well be displeas'd at their precise or censorious Temper, as they at the Liberty I take ?

But this is no just Way of Arguing, as to what relates to giving and taking Offence : We are not hereby to understand an arbitrary Displeasure, or the breaking forth of Passion against those who are not of the same Opinion with our selves ; but when an Offence is justly taken, 'tis at those Actions which seem to render Religion inconsistent with it self ; when Men destroy with one Hand, what they build with the other. Thus the Apostle *Peter* gave Offence to *Paul*, when in one Company he shew'd himself free and familiar with the converted Gentiles, and in another was shy of them, and symboliz'd with the *Jews* in their Contempt of, and Opposition to them, *Gal. 2. 12.* An Offence of this Nature may be taken by those who are far from being rank'd among the weaker Sort of Christians ; Our Lord himself was justly offended with *Peter*, when he would have dissuaded him, considering the Miseries which he was to pass through, to spare himself, and, as it were, to lay aside the Design for which he came into the World, *Mat. 16. 23.* From hence it follows, That the offended Party, is not always to be treated with Disdain ; though this be the common Fate of those who express a Dislike of those Things they apprehend to be sinful, but can't perswade those whom they reprove, to be of the same Mind.

The Objections frequently alledged in the Case of Scandal, are such as these, *viz.* That the Offence is owing to Fancy, rather than Judgment; and that Persons who set up for Reprovers, will take upon 'em to prescribe to others, in the most indifferent Matters, and so be offended if we don't follow their Directions in all Things which they call Sin or Duty; and to comply with what they suggest will be endless; and not to offend, almost impossible.

This Matter ought to be set in a true Light, and therefore we take it for granted, that some may be offended without just Reason, especially when Pride and Passion take Occasion to render others Offenders in those Things, wherein the Glory of God is not really concern'd. Some find Fault with the most inoffensive Behaviour; with whom, not to be singular, is to be criminal. So that in this Case we are forc'd to distinguish between an Offence given, and taken, while we pity the uneasy Temper of those we have to do with. But shall all Offences be so esteem'd? It is one Thing to offend a few, and that in those Things that are generally held lawful; and another Thing to offend against the *Generation of the Righteous*. There is a vast Difference between offending in doing that which we can prove to be a Duty, and doing that which carries in it the Appearance of Evil, or is without Doubt a Snare to us, and might be omitted, without the least Detriment accruing thereby.

But suppose the offended Party be weak, and is disgusted with that which carries in it only the Appearance of Evil, this deserves some Degree of Compliance, especially when the thing may be easily avoided by us; but not abstaining from it,

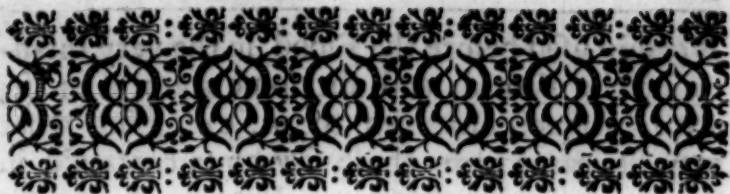
it, would be extremely injurious to others. This seem'd to be the Case of the Church, in that great Controversy about Things offer'd to Idols, *Rom. 14.* Where observe the Apostle determines, that *whatever is sold in the Shambles* might be eat, tho' offer'd to Idols, provided it was not eat under that Notion; yet how tender was he of those who cou'd not be cur'd of this Prejudice, advising others not to *Destroy their weak Brother for whom Christ dy'd.* And since the Ease and Comfort of those weak Believers was of far greater Consequence than the Use of that Liberty, which otherwise might be taken, the Apostle professes, *1 Cor. 8. 13. If Meat make my Brother offend, I will eat no Flesh while the World standeth.*

But to apply this to our present Argument. Were the Games we oppose, meerly an Offence to the *weaker sort of Christians*, wou'd it not be expedient, yea necessary to lay them aside, rather than give them Occasion to think the Holy Ways of God give Allowances to what they judge sinful: And how little will your Example be regarded by them in those Things that are lawful and praise-worthy, to whom, in this respect, it is a Scandal? But have we only to do with the *weaker sort* herein, have these Games been a Rock of Offence only to them? Is the Prejudice but lately conceiv'd? Or rather have we not a Cloud of Witnesses against them, among those who have been *burning and shining Lights*, the Glory of the Age in which they liv'd? Were our Fathers to look out of their Graves, to see how, what they so much abhorr'd is practis'd in this Day, they wou'd conclude that Religion is at a low Ebb amongst us: And are there

there not many who constantly bear their Testimony against them, and these not the weakest or most injudicious part of Christ's Followers? Let the *hoary Head*, found in the way of *Righteousness*, determine this Matter; ask him if he has not observ'd, that the Esteem and Practice of these Games always increase with the decay of Godliness.

To this let me add, as a farther ground of Offence, the Prejudice which the rising Generation sustains by such Examples, that which their Fathers can dispense with, the Children generally delight in, and it may be, pursue to their own Ruin, so destructive is the influence of a bad Example. Look further into the Assemblies of God's People, and there you'll find some *enquiring the way to Sion, with their Faces thitherward*. What Thoughts will they have of those *who were in Christ before 'em*, or at least appear'd to be so, if they allow of those Things in themselves, which are not of good Report?

Thus we have consider'd the Unlawfulness of some Recreations. Let me conclude, with an earnest Request to you, to take heed of falling by Things which seem harmless, and commit your selves into his Hand, who is able to keep you safe in the Hour of Temptation, and to sweeten all outward Enjoyments with a sense of his Love.



A
DISCOURSE
Concerning the
O R I G I N
A N D
Superstitious Observance
O F
Religious FESTIVALS.

THAT the Church of God has not, in any Age of the World, been without a fixed Rule of Divine Worship, must be acknowledg'd by all who own a Providence that takes care of the Affairs of Man ; and the Glory which God lays claim to as a Sovereign Legislator, which to divest him of, would be to suppose it possible for him to cease to be God. 'Tis true the Modes of
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Worship used before the Flood, in the very Infancy of the World, and for some Ages after it, are very much unknown to us, excepting what may be learnt from these few hints contain'd in Scripture relating thereunto. But that there were *Sacrifices* offered soon after the fall of Man, may be gathered in part from God's clothing our first Parents with the *Skins of Beasts*; and more especially from *Abel's* having offer'd the *firstlings of his Flock*, which the Apostle says, he did by *Faith*: And that this Branch of Religious Worship was transmitted down to succeeding Ages in the Church, and even imitated by the World, as receiv'd by Tradition from it, 'tis needless to prove. Tho' 'tis uncertain, whether the Sacrifices offered before *Moses's* time were all of one kind, (*viz.*) Burnt-Offerings, as some suppose; or whether there might be some *Festivals* annex'd to them; much more, whether there were stated times for Religious Worship, besides the *seventh Day Sabbath*: But these Things are set in a clear light, if we look into the Ceremonial Law.

The first *publick Festival* we read of, was the *Passover*, in which the Blood of the Lamb was shed, to signify the expiating of Sin by the Blood of *Jesus*; and the Flesh thereof eaten as a Type of the spiritual Refreshment and Comfort which was to be expected from it.

The next *solemn Festival* was celebrated at the Foot of Mount *Sinai*, when the People enter'd into a Covenant-Engagement to be the Lord's; on which Occasion, Burnt-Offerings and Peace-Offerings were offered, and the Seventy Elders, as representing the whole Body, sat down to eat and drink in the presence of God, and had an extraordinary View of his Glory, *Exod.* the 24th. 5th to 11th.

After

After this, several *Festivals* were instituted to be celebrated at certain times of the Year, in Three of which, all the Males of the whole Congregation, (*viz.*) such as were of a sufficient Age, were to appear before the Lord, in the Place which He should choose to put his Name there. See *Exod.* 23. 14th to 17th. I shall not here consider the particular Times in which they were observ'd; or the differing Kinds of Sacrifices appointed for each of 'em, which you will find determin'd in many Places of the Books of *Moses*. All that I shall observe, at present, is, that the proper Sacrifices with which the Solemnity began, were offered to God, with suitable exercises of Faith, which was directed hereby, to have an Eye to the Satisfaction of Christ. Herein, the *Blood* that was shed, and the *Flesh* of those Beasts that were wholly consum'd by Fire, are said to be the *Lord's*; that is, design'd to typifie the *Sacrifice of Christ*, which God laid a special Claim to, as a great Means to advance his Glory in the World, and in which his Soul was well pleas'd. After this, the remains of what was offer'd, were divided, a Part being allotted for the Maintenance of the Priests, another Part, given to the Offerer to eat at home with his Friends. When the publick Service was over, the Remainder was to be eaten *before the Lord*, as a part of this instituted Worship. From this Account of the *Jewish Festivals*, Three Things may be justly inferr'd.

1. That they were not instituted but by a Divine Warrant; therefore it follows, That it would have been as great an Instance of Profaneness, and no less an Affront to their Divine Law-giver, to institute Festivals of this Nature, than to

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offer

offer Sacrifices of their own Invention, or make any other Additions to his Worship.

2. We are not to suppose, that any Religious *Festivals* were instituted to propagate the Memory of particular Saints, under that Dispensation, though there were many who made as considerable a Figure in the Church, and did as great Things for God, as any who are remarkable in History since our Saviour's time.

3. These *Festivals* were *Ordinances* of *Communion*, especially those in which the whole Congregation met together thrice in a Year: Hereby they testified their Consent to walk together in all the Statutes and Institutions of God, and their spiritual Joy, in being made partakers of the Blessings which they look'd for, by him, who is the great *Peace-Offering* for his Church. The Apostle refers to this, when he compares one of these Ordinances with the Lord's-Supper, 1 Cor. 5. 7, 8. *Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us, therefore let us keep the Feast*, q. d. 'As the Jewish Church first offered the Sacrifice, and then eat what was allotted for them, before the Lord; even so we, in the Lord's-Supper, take a View by Faith, of Christ our Sacrifice, and publicly declare our Subjection to him, and Communion with one another in what relates hereunto.

Thus much concerning the Original and Design of *Jewish Festivals*.

The next Thing to be inquired into, is whether there were any other *Festivals* amongst them, which were observed in a different manner; and how far they may be said to have been abused. We shall take Notice of two, (*viz.*) The *Feast of Purim*, and that of *Dedication*.

1. Con-

1. Concerning the *Feast of Purim*, we read of the Reason and first Institution of it, *Esther* 9. 20, to 22. 'Tis not said, as in other Feasts, before mention'd, that they offer'd Sacrifices by particular Divine Direction, and eat and drank before the Lord, which probably gave Occasion to some of the *Jews* themselves, as is observ'd out of their own Writings*, to think this Feast a kind of Innovation, and against the Law. We read indeed of their Feasting and Joy, and sending Portions one to another, and Gifts to the Poor, but nothing farther. The Modern *Jews* indeed in observing this Festival have added some signs of Anger against, and Triumph over *Haman*; But this seems to be a late Invention not known in *Mordecai's* time. And of all the *Festivals* which they now observe, this is the most Luxurious, wherein Revelling, Gluttony, and Drunkenness, are not only allow'd of, but reckon'd agreeable to the Design of the *Festival* †.

As to the Question that depends hereupon, (*viz.*) Whether *Religious Festivals* may be imposed without a Divine Sanction? It may be answer'd, That in *Mordecai's* Time, the *Jews* had inspir'd Prophets amongst 'em, and 'tis not unlikely, that he was of that Number, as an Instance whereof many conjecture that he penn'd the Book of *Esther*. If this be true, there is no absurdity in supposing, that in appointing this *Festival*, he acted by Divine Direction; but if this be not allow'd, the *Festival* being nothing else but a Time of Vacation for Religious Worship, and

* See Lightfoot's *Hor. Heb. & Tal.* on *John* 10. 22.

† See Buxtorf *Synagog. Judaic.* cap. 29.

not formally containing in it an act of Worship, as was said of other *Festivals*, and it being founded on a very good Moral Reason, (*viz.*) one of the greatest Deliverances they ever had, I see no Reason why *Mordecai*, as a Civil Magistrate, might not institute it, tho' without the immediate direction of the Spirit of Inspiration.

2. The other, *viz.* *The Feast of Dedication*, was instituted about 300 Years after the former, when the Gift of Prophecy was wholly ceased, and the Affairs of the *Jewish Church* exceedingly upon the Decline, about 160 Years before our *Saviour's Birth*. At this Time the Traditions of the Elders began to be in Vogue, and Superstition was coming in like a Flood. The Occasion of the Institution hereof, as those who give an Account of the *Antiquities* and *History of the Jewish Church*, inform us, was the restoring Religion, repairing the Temple, and more particularly, consecrating the Altar by *Judas Maccabeus*, after a cruel Persecution, and total Restraint of publick Worship, and setting up Idolatry in the Room of it; whereby the Holy Place and Vessels were defiled by *Antiochus Epiphanes*, whom some ancient Writers call a Type of *Antichrist*. The Persecution he stirred up was sharp, but short, as was foretold by *Daniel*; it lasted three Years and a half, which according to his Prophetic Way of speaking, he calls, *Chap. 7. 25. A Time and Times, and the Division of Time*. Little is said concerning the Manner of observing this *Festival*, but what seems mean and trifling, very agreeable to the Genius of the *Talmudick Writers*. 'Twas celebrated with less of Riot and Luxury, than that mention'd in our last Head; but with the superstitious Injunction, That every
one

one should set up *Lights* in their Houses, according to the Number of Inhabitants. The particular Circumstances, ordained by their Masters of Ceremony, relating hereunto, and the great Stress laid upon the most minute Things, they who have Leisure and Inclination may see at large, in the Writings of those who are inquisitive into this Matter *.

One Thing however ought to be inquired into, before we dismiss this Head, viz. Whether our Saviour, by being at *Jerusalem*, and there walking in the *Temple*, in *Solomon's Porch*, as 'tis said he did, at the Time of this *Festival*, *John* 10. 22, 23. gave Countenance to it; and thereby would have us know, from his own Example, that we ought rather to joyn in superstitious Worship, than dissent from an Establish'd Church? This Argument *Lightfoot* prosecutes, as well as the Cause will bear, in an Occasional *Sermon*, printed in his *Works* †.

But, I humbly conceive, Christ gave no Countenance to it; for if he did, it must be either by his being at *Jerusalem*, at that Time, or by his walking in *Solomon's Porch*: But this cannot be inferr'd from the former; for no one was obliged to come up to *Jerusalem* to attend this *Festival*, as they were obliged to do in the *Three publick ones* of Divine Institution, before mention'd; for it was observed in their respective Cities, and the greatest Part of the Solemnity, it seems, was performed in their own private Houses: Therefore Christ's being at *Jerusalem* at this Time was

* *Jos. Ant. L. 12. C. 11. Buxt. Syn. Jud. C. 28. Light. Cap. supra Cit. 1 Macc. 4. † Vol. 2. p. 1036.*

occasion'd by some more valuable End. And the Reason why the Evangelist here mentions this *Festival* (the only Place where 'tis taken Notice of in Scripture) was, that he might point to us the particular Time of the Year when Christ was at *Jerusalem*, which gives some Light to the History of his Life : But it no more argues, That he kept the *Festival*, because 'twas the Time in which 'twas celebrated, than if I should say I came to such a Place at *Christmas*, it might be inferred from thence, I came there to celebrate the *Festival* so called. And as to his *walking in Solomon's Porch*, it can't be argu'd from that ; for tho' 'tis true, this was an Apartment of the Temple, yet 'twas not a Place design'd for any Part of the Temple-Service : But there the *Sanhedrim* sat. Christ therefore walked there, 'tis probable, not as designing at this Time to attend on the Worship of the Day, but that He might have Occasion to converse with some of the Scribes and Pharisees, or other Members of that Body, to assert his Mission, as at other Times, and to confute their false Opinions concerning him.

One Thing more I shall take Leave to observe, *viz.* That how superstitious soever the Custom observ'd in this *Festival* appears to be, the *Church of Rome* has thought fit to retain it in some of her *Festivals* ; for doubtless, from hence the Practice of lighting 12 Candles, in the *Consecration* or *Dedication* of their Churches, took its Rise ; as also that of setting up Candles, on the 2d of *February*, in the Festival appointed in Commemoration of the *Purification of the Virgin Mary*, commonly called *Candlemas* : And also in the Festival of the *Nativity* of our Saviour, by which they

they pretend to signify His coming into the World, who is the Light thereof*. By this you have a small Taste, how fond the Papists are of Jewish Superstitions in some of their Festivals.

But let us now consider some Things relating to the *Origin of Festivals* in the *Christian Church*: No Command or Example of Christ is pretended to be the Foundation thereof; 'tis true, two or three Scriptures, in which the Feast of *Pentecost* is mention'd, are alledg'd to prove that this was observed by the Church, in the Apostolick Age. But it don't follow, That because the Apostle *determined to be at Jerusalem the Day of Pentecost*, Acts 20. 16. or to *tarry at Ephesus till Pentecost*, 1 Cor. 16. 8. That he intended any Thing else hereby, but the Time of the Year which the *Jews* observed under that Denomination, as the *Feast of Weeks*, not that he design'd to observe it, since he makes Use of it, only as a Character whereby to distinguish Time.

If it be objected, That the Apostles were *met together on that Day*, when the Holy Ghost descended upon them, Acts 2. 1. It can't be argu'd from their Practice, before they receiv'd full Instructions concerning Gospel-Worship to be observed in the Church, that this was design'd as a Precedent to after Ages: And they might be allow'd to observe the *Jewish Institutions*, till the Spirit gave 'em better Information.

Again, That Scripture, 1 Cor. 5. 8. *Let us keep the Feast, &c.* which is alledged in Defence

* See Selden *de Synod. Lib. 3. Cap. 13. Calvar. Ritual. Eccl. Part 2. Seff. 2. Cap. 16.*

of the Observation of Christian Festivals, has no Respect to the *Passover*, as may be inferred from what has been before hinted, any farther than as the *Lord's Supper* is compar'd with it: But supposing that it should be allow'd that some Days were observed by the converted *Jews*, and by others, to prevent their being offended; 'tis also certain, that the Apostle saw Reason to forbid this Practice, when he perceived the ill Tendency thereof, *Gal. 4. 10, 11. Col. 2. 16.*

Whether the Apostle had wholly rooted out the Remains of this *Judaizing Temper*, before his Death, is uncertain, however, in the next Age 'twas reviv'd. The *Festival* which was substituted in the Room of the *Passover*, viz. *Easter*, was very early observ'd in the Church; as appears from the great Divisions between the *Eastern* and *Western Churches*, in the 2d Century, about the Time of celebrating it. The former maintaining that it ought to be observ'd on the same Day, on which the *Passover* was by the *Jews*. The other, That it ought to be observed the Lord's Day after; and the Controversy arose to such a Height, that *Victor*, Bishop of *Rome*, at one Stroke excommunicated all the *Eastern Church**: Which many thought a rash Action, it being long before the Bishop of *Rome* pretended to be Christ's Vicegerent, or Head of the Church: This being in the latter End of the 2d Century; whereas that Compliment was not passed upon him, till the Beginning of the 7th. 'Tis also well known that the *Council of Nice* was conven'd to determine this Controversy, *A. D.*

* *Enseb. Hist. Eccl. L. 5. C. 24, 25.*

325. which they did, according to the Mind of the Western Church, as 'tis observed to this Day.

I will not enquire, whether 'twas worth *Constantine's* while, to call a *General Council*, to issue this Matter; or whether that venerable Body, when convened, would not have done more Service to the Cause of Christ, had they then decreed that it should be wholly laid aside: But this is sufficient to my present Design, to prove, That this *Festival* was then observed; and not without a Mixture of Superstition, as appears hereby. Besides this, there was also another *Festival*, borrowed from the *Jews*, of the same Antiquity, to wit, That of *Pentecost*. These Things are so well known, that I need not produce Vouchers to prove 'em.

In the 3d *Century* the Church was born down with Persecution; yet, through the peculiar Blessing of God, it abounded with Zeal for His Name. There were many *Festivals* observ'd, 'tis true, but in a very differing manner from those which were introduced in after Ages. Many excellent Christians had given an honourable Testimony to Religion, with their Blood; whose Memory was precious, as their exemplary Behaviour, and triumphant Entrance into Heaven, were beyond Measure, encouraging to those who survived 'em. The Day of their Martyrdom was called their *Birth-day*, as it gave 'em Admittance into a better World; and great Care was taken to keep up the Remembrance hereof. To this End several Notaries * were appointed, to com-

* *Cyp. L. 3. Epist. 6. & Not. Pamel. in eund. Baron. Annal. ad Ann. 238.*

mit to Writing an Account of their Imprisonment, and the Tortures they endured ; and how they behaved themselves under 'em ; also what Defence they made for Christianity, when they were apprehended and tried ; and what comfortable Experiences, they profess'd themselves to have, of the Presence of God, at the Stake ; and what Messages they might send, from thence, to their *Brethren and Companions in Tribulation, and in the Kingdom and Patience of Jesus Christ*. Part of the Respect they paid 'em was, by gathering together their Bones, if 'twas possible to procure 'em ; which they set a greater Value on, than on precious Stones *, and buried them, with Testimonies of Respect, though not with much Pomp, or publick Solemnity, which would not be admitted in those Times. And they made their Tombs the Places to which they resorted for publick Worship ; for as yet no Churches were erected for that End.

The Anniversary Remembrance of these *Wor-thies*, was observ'd indeed, with a Recital of their Sufferings, and exemplary Death ; the Celebration of the Lord's Supper, as it were signifying, their being, in some Respects, one Body with the Church Triumphant ; and Prayer to God, for the like Measure of Constancy, in espousing His Cause, which they had beheld in those whose Remains were there interr'd. However, they did not proceed so far, as the Church did in succeeding Ages, by entertaining the Auditory, with little else but fulsome Flattery, contain'd in long Panegyricks on their Virtues ; embellished with

* *Euseb. Hist. Eccl. L. 4. C. 15.*

many fabulous Stories, of Things which they never did : Much less was their Intercession desir'd, or their Merits extoll'd, as set up in Competition with Christ's. Though, 'tis plain enough, that These, and many other Corruptions, took their Rise from hence. And, in following Ages, we read of many superstitious Ceremonies, used on such like Occasions ; splendid Sepulchres being erected to their Honour, were strewed with Flowers, perfumed with the richest Balsam and Spices, and Wine poured on them : Their Relicks preserved, as reckon'd a considerable Part of the Church's Treasure ; and Pilgrimages undertaken to them, and Miracles pretended to be wrought by 'em, on those who visited their Shrines. But all this was when outward Prosperity had been long enjoy'd by the Church, and was attended with many Corruptions, brought into it, which exceedingly sullied its Primitive Beauty.

This leads us to consider the State of Affairs, when the Roman Empire embrac'd Christianity, in the 4th Century. *Constantine the Great*, who gave Peace and abundance of Temporal Felicity to the Church, having been, in his younger Years, a Heathen ; and being, beyond Measure, desirous to oblige them to embrace Christianity, and especially, that they might not take occasion to despise it by reason of the plainness of its Worship, he adorned it with a great appearance of outward Pomp and Splendor. The *Christian Churches* came not a whit behind the *Heathen Temples*, in Beauty and Magnificence, excepting, that the one was adorn'd with *Heathen Gods* ; The other had not made so great a progress in Idolatry, as to set up the Images of Saints in 'em. The *Christian Priesthood* also had as considerable

Marks of Honour annex'd to it, as the *Heathen*, and Revenues answerable hereunto; that they who were wholly byass'd by the views of Temporal Advantage might not decline it. And whereas there were many *Festivals* celebrated to the Honour of their *Heathen Gods*, He invented others, grac'd with the Christian Name, to supply their Place, and that in, or near, the same time of the Year, that so the People might not suppose the external show of Religion was lost, or that those Times which were before consecrated to Idols, were now to be reckon'd wholly profane.

I need not spend time to consider the Agreement between the *Heathen* and *Christian Festivals*; no one who compares 'em together, will doubt of the *latters* taking their rise from the *former*; neither do they, who most strenuously contend for their observation, so much deny this, as defend their Practice, notwithstanding, by asserting the Obligation Men are under to obey the *Decrees* of the *Church* relating hereunto, without considering, whence those who made them, took their first Plan. Others indeed, pretend to vindicate the Wisdom and Moderation of the Church, in ordaining, that there should be so great a Similitude between *their Religious Festivals* and those of the *Heathen*, that thereby they might be more easily brought into the Bosom of the Church. Thus Pope Gregory * tells us, how the Pagan *Festivals* were chang'd into Christian ones, in as much as some things must be done in imitation of them, that they might more easily be perswaded to embrace the Christian Faith.

* *Oper. Lib. 9. Epist. 71.*

And now, if we look into the Annals of the Church, we shall find, that every *Age* produc'd new *Festivals*. The *5th* was very fruitful in its productions of this Nature, and so were several succeeding *Ages*: But, as tho' their Number had not been sufficiently increas'd, in the *10th Century*, the *Romish Church* took an effectual Method to fill up their Kalendar with them; for then the Custom first began of Canonizing Saints, and thereby declaring, that they ought to be invoc'd, and *Churches* dedicated to their Honour, and *Festivals* observ'd, to celebrate their pretended *Miracles*. Herein they imitated the Practice of *Rome-Pagan*, in Dei'ing their Heroes †. The Saints, whose *Festivals* were before observ'd, had they been now living, would have look'd with the greatest Indignation on the Honours paid 'em. But those canoniz'd Saints, whose Admirers obtain'd this for them by Interest, if not by Purchase, had so little to entitle them to that Character when they liv'd, that they, who were really Saints, would hardly have own'd many of 'em for *Brethren*. But I shall not give a particular Relation of the Time, when several of the *Festivals*, dedicated to the Honour of the *Virgin Mary*, as her *immaculate Conception*, *Purification*, *Assumption*, with those celebrated in Memory of the *Apostles*, &c. were first Instituted, which you'll find in the Writings * of those who are larger on this Subject than I propose to be.

† Cic. de Nat. Deor. lib. 2. Euseb. Prep. Evang. lib. 2. cap. 9.

* Hospin. de Orig. Fest. Chr. passim. Cald. Alt. Damasc. Cap. 10. Perkins's Demonst. of the Probl. in his Works, Vol. 2. p. 597. Pierce's Vind. &c. Part 3. Chap. 11.

All that I shall at present consider, shall be the *Festival* instituted in Commemoration of the *Birth of our Saviour*, call'd *Christmas*. Here observe, the Word *Birth-day* is taken in its proper sense, not, as when apply'd to the Martyrs, as above : But I may take leave to observe that the Celebration of *Birth-days*, in this sense, was not usually practis'd by the Church, tho' 'twas among the Heathen, and that with a Mixture of Luxury and Religious Solemnity *. And some of the Fathers have express'd themselves with a great deal of Warmth against observing the Day in which a Person was born ; thus *Origen* †, who flourish'd 230 Years after Christ, and *Jerom* ||, *Ann.* 378.

If it be enquired when our Saviour's *Birth-day* was first observ'd, it may easily be prov'd, that 'twas not known in the *three first Centuries* ; and in the 4th, when 'twas first observ'd, 'twas on the 6th of *January*, which Day was first call'd *Epiphany*, to signify the Appearance of God in our Nature : Though soon after, when this Day was kept on *Dec. 25.* the Sense of the Word *Epiphany* was altered, and another *Festival* appointed, on that Day, in Commemoration of *His Baptism*, which they, without Ground, suppose to be thereon. But after that, 'twas apply'd to signify the appearing of the Star to the wise Men, who on ungrounded Tradition, were reckoned to be three Kings, under which Notion the Day is kept at present. *Clement of Alexandria* **, who flourish'd in the End of the 2d Century, is so far from making mention of this *Festi-*

* *Hor. Lib. 4. Ode 11. Virg. Ecl. 3. v. 76. Juven. Sat. 11. v. 82, &c. Pers. Sat. 2. v. 1, &c.* † *Oper. Tom. 8. sup. Levit.* || *Com. in Matt. L. 2.* ** *Stromat. L. 1. juxta fin.*

val, that he reckons it an Instance of vain Curiosity, in such of his Time, who pretended to tell the Day of the Year, in which our Saviour was born ; and so gives an Account of several Days, on which one or another conjectur'd He was born, but none of 'em the 25th of *December*, and not the least mention of any *Festival* observ'd in his Time. *Chrysostom* indeed, who flourished in the End of the 4th *Century*, says, That the Custom of observing this *Festival*, on the 25th of *December*, was then but of Ten Years standing in the *Eastern Church*, who received it from the *Western*. And neither of 'em had observ'd it long before ; notwithstanding what is argued from some spurious Writings, which carry in 'em the specious Pretence of Antiquity. If the true Time of *Christ's Nativity* be enquired after, it is much easier to prove, that it cannot be determined, than to fix the certain Day thereof. The Argument made Use of by those * who think it was *December 25*. is as follows ; *Zacharias* the Father of *John the Baptist* was *High-Priest*, say they, because he burnt *Incense* in the Temple ; this must therefore be in the great Day of *Expiation*, in the Tenth of the Month *Tizri*, or about the latter End of *September* : And when his Ministry was over, he went to his own House, after which his Wife conceived, and Six Months after that the *Virgin Mary* conceived ; *Ver.* 23, 24, and 36. Accordingly *John the Baptist* was born the 24th of *June* ; and our Saviour *Dec. 25*.

But to this it may be easily reply'd, That 'tis certain *Zacharias* was not *High Priest*, for he is call'd, ἱερεὺς τις, a certain Priest, and is said to be of the Course of *Abia* ; whereas the *High-Priest*

* *Chrys.* op. Tom. 5. mihi p. 405. *Aug.* Tom. 9. Tra. 49. in *Joh-*
was

was the President of all the Courses, and not included in any one of them; and his *burning Incense* was a Part of the daily Service, *Exod. 30. 7.*

As for the Argument of *Lightfoot* and others, to prove that *Christ* was born in the latter End of *August*, or the Beginning of *September*, which will not put the Matter out of doubt, 'tis, in short, this; viz. The First of the 24 Courses of the Priests (who began their Service, on the Sabbath, as did all the others) minister'd after the *Passover*, in the Month *Abib*, or the latter End of *March*; now reckoning 8 Weeks from thence, the Course of *Abia* ministred in the Month *Sivan*, viz. The latter End of *May*, or Beginning of *June*, and 6 Months after that our *Saviour* was conceived, viz. About the Beginning of *December*, and was born about the Beginning of *September* following. But this Account is not sufficient to determine the Matter. For if it could be proved that the Course of *Abia* was at this Time the 8th, as it was before the Captivity, 1 *Chron. 24. 10.* and that the first Course always ministred after the *Passover*, yet it would be hard to prove, that those Words, *after those Days Elizabeth conceived*, *Luke 1. 24.* must be meant immediately after, and not some Weeks after; so that the exact Time of *Christ's Nativity* remains uncertain. But if it could be prov'd, that *Christ* was born on that Day, the manner of observing it with Revellings, *Masquerades*, Gluttony, Drunkenness, and Gaming, is too much like the manner of the *Heathen* in celebrating their *Saturnals**, about the same Time of the Year: And 'tis very unbecoming a *Christian*, who professes Subjection to him, who was manifest that he might destroy the Works of the Devil.

* *Senec. Epist. L. 1. Ep. 18. Hor. Serm. L. 2. Sat. 7. v. 4.*